

Compliance Inspections

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) administers the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). This law provides for the humane care and treatment of animals bred for commercial sale, transported in commerce, used in biomedical research, and exhibited to the public.

APHIS' Animal Care (AC) program enforces the AWA primarily through inspections of regulated facilities. To ensure that compliance with the AWA is continually maintained, all facilities that keep animals regulated under the Act must be licensed or registered with APHIS. AC personnel conduct unannounced inspections of every licensed or registered facility in the country.

When inspecting a facility, AC inspectors thoroughly observe and document in inspection reports all areas of care and treatment covered by the AWA. APHIS requires all owners and managers of licensed and registered facilities to comply with the following standards:

Housing—Animals must be housed in a structurally sound facility in good repair. The facility must contain the animals and protect them from other animals or extreme weather and temperatures. Drainage systems must also be in good repair.

Ventilation—Animals must be provided with cool air or increased ventilation if the ambient temperature is above 85 °F or heat if the temperature falls below 45 °F.

Lighting—Facilities must be lit well enough to allow safe and easy access for feeding, cleaning, and complete inspection.

Interior Surfaces—The interior of a facility must be substantially impervious to moisture and be able to be easily cleaned and sanitized.

Primary Enclosures—Animals must be housed in structurally sound enclosures that are in good repair and meet APHIS' minimum space requirements. The floors must protect the animals from injury. The cages must be dry and clean and allow animals easy access to food and water.

Sanitation—Animal waste must be removed and disposed of regularly and as necessary. Primary cages or enclosures should be sanitized at least once every 2 weeks. Facilities must not allow trash to accumulate.

Pest Control—Facility managers must have an effective program to control insects, ectoparasites, and avian and mammalian pests.

Feeding and Watering—Animals must be provided with nutritious, palatable food that is free from contamination, properly stored, and served in a clean receptacle. Potable water must be made available twice daily for 1 hour if it is not available all the time.

Outdoor Shelter—Animals must be protected from sunlight, precipitation, and extreme temperatures.

Compatibility—Female animals in heat must be separated from male animals except for breeding purposes. Animals with vicious dispositions should be housed apart from other animals. Puppies and kittens should be separated from adult animals other than their mothers. Different species of animals should not be housed together unless compatible.

Recordkeeping—Facility managers must maintain accurate and complete records of the sources of all animals that come into their possession. Managers also are required to keep records of the dates of acquisition and disposition and to properly identify the animals on the premises. These records must be made available for inspection whenever necessary.

Adequate Veterinary Care—Programs of disease control and prevention, euthanasia, and veterinary care must be established and maintained under the supervision and assistance of a veterinarian. A caretaker also must observe the animals daily.

Handling—Every licensee is required to handle animals properly at all times whether he or she is petting, working, feeding, crating, performing, or transferring them.

Transportation—Licensees and registrants are required to provide animals with adequate space, ventilation, and shipping containers during transportation. Most animals transported must be weaned and at least 8 weeks old.

Inspection Procedures

When an AC inspector arrives at a facility, the owner manager must give the inspector full access to all areas where regulated animals are kept. All animals regulated under the Act must be shown to the inspector, who may examine any animals that appear to be in poor health. The inspector also observes how the animals are handled by their caretakers. Dealers, exhibitors, breeders, caretakers, or researchers who interfere with the inspector's duties are in violation of the AWA.

Generally the owner or manager of a facility accompanies the AC inspector during inspection. If the inspector observes that the facility is not in full compliance with the AWA requirements, he or she will explain to the owner or manager all deficiencies noted during the inspection. The inspector will then give the owner a deadline for correcting these deficiencies. The owner or manager and the inspector both sign the completed compliance inspection form.

If deficiencies are noted, the animal care inspector will return to reinspect the facility. If a facility has not corrected the deficiencies during the given timeframe, all uncorrected problems are carefully documented for possible legal action. The inspector will return to facilities that have problems as needed to encourage compliance with the AWA. When a facility fails to correct deficiencies or if the health of the animals at the facility is in jeopardy, the inspector will forward the documented case for possible legal action.

The Animal Care Inspector

APHIS' AC inspectors are veterinarians or animal health technicians dedicated to providing proper care for animals by bringing people dealing with them into compliance with the AWA. Inspectors are trained to evaluate the health of regulated animals and to detect noncompliance in areas such as structures, house-keeping, and recordkeeping.

AC inspectors receive special training in the proper care of marine mammals, exotic animals, and animals used in research. Inspectors also receive extensive training in how to conduct inspections at airport terminals, zoos, and commercial animal breeding facilities, among others.

APHIS currently has more than 70 AC inspectors in the United States, who are strategically placed where regulated facilities are located.

Additional Information

For more information contact:

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